

Staff-Parish Conversations to Encourage and Strengthen Pastoral Ministry

Effective pastoral leadership is essential for growing and vital churches to reach new disciples for Jesus Christ. While there are many components of effective leadership and each congregational context is different, there are some overarching categories that define effective pastoral leadership.

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary has studied the ways many annual conferences and clergy themselves define pastoral effectiveness. The Center found three consistent components that build on one another and together make possible effective pastoral leadership.

- **Character** — who a leader is in terms of spiritual authenticity, wholeness, and integrity
- **Competence** — what a leader knows and does in the diverse areas of pastoral ministry
- **Contribution** — what a leader accomplishes to advance the mission of making new disciples, fostering spiritual growth, and serving the world

Pastors want constructive feedback so they can become better pastoral leaders. Likewise, Staff-Parish Relations Committees want to know how they can enhance their pastor's ministry and their congregation's witness. In the absence of a structure, it is hard for either group to get the information they need.

This exercise seeks to facilitate dialogue using the Character-Competence-Contribution framework to affirm the gifts of both pastors and congregations, while together discerning ways to improve for greater growth and vitality.

Step One: Preparing for the Conversation

Prayer. Commit to praying for each other daily in the coming year as you work together to seek and do God's will for your congregation.

Participants. The most obvious participants are the pastor and the Staff-Parish Relations Committee members. If there are others who should be involved, the pastor and the committee should decide this together and invite others to participate.

Preparation. All the conversation participants should be given this outline in advance. Set the time and place for the conversation in advance so people have adequate time to prepare. Allow adequate time for the conversation so that participants do not feel rushed and are comfortable sharing openly.

Format. The pastor and the committee should decide on a format that works best for them. Participants will want to prepare to respond to the questions, perhaps making notes for themselves. If the group decides that they wish to have input ahead of time for distribution, this should be a group decision with clear instructions about what is expected of everyone. This guide is prepared so that it can be worked through in one session in most cases.

➔ A helpful one-page reference resource is "Giving and Receiving Feedback" available at churchleadership.com/SPRCFeedback

Step Two: Questions for Guiding the Conversation

The questions for discussion are grouped around the three components of character, competence, and contribution. Each person does not need to respond to every question, only to the ones that seem appropriate and relevant for them. Remember that specific examples are helpful.

Character — The character category includes matters of personal faith and faithful living, honesty and integrity, maintaining personal and professional boundaries, seeking balance and wholeness, and self-awareness, including the ability to learn from failure and mistakes.

- SPRC: What are some words you would use to describe your pastor to someone else — words that never mentioned professional skills but only how you would describe the pastor as a person?
- SPRC: Balancing the myriad of life and ministry issues can become a challenge for most pastors. In what ways do you observe your pastor pursuing practices that contribute to spiritual, mental, and physical health?
- Clergy: What aspects of your physical, emotional, and spiritual life about which you are feeling good and are there areas in which you hope to improve in the coming year for which the committee might have ideas or ways to be helpful?

Competence — The competence category is comprised of a broad range of skills and aptitudes required for ministry such as biblical and theological knowledge, teaching skills, preaching and leading worship, congregational care, administrative skills, and professional judgment and strategic discernment.

- SPRC: When was the pastor's preaching or teaching particularly meaningful to you in the last year? What made it so?
- SPRC: In what ways have you or others you know experienced the pastor as especially helpful when responding to personal or pastoral concerns?
- SPRC: The pastor gives oversight to the ordering of the life and ministry of the congregation. To help the pastor do this work most effectively, share any aspects of the church's operations that seem to be doing well and any that may need further review and attention.
- Clergy: If you engaged the committee as consultants to help you grow in your ministry functions in the next year, what types of suggestions might you find helpful for them to share now?

Contribution — Contribution addresses the outcomes of effective ministry — leading a congregation toward a compelling vision, building teams and developing new leaders, reaching out and engaging new people, nurturing faith development, and encouraging growth in congregational mission and service.

- SPRC: Reaching new people gets more difficult each year. What are some ways your pastor's leadership helps the congregation reach out to others?
- SPRC: How has the pastor's ministry helped you or others you know grow as disciples this year?
- SPRC: How is the pastor cultivating a church culture of service to the community and others?
- Clergy: Share an aspect of church life where you hope for greater fruitfulness next year. Then together discuss specific steps that you and others in the church might do to make this happen.

Step Three: Capturing and Using the Feedback

What are some strengths of our pastor we have affirmed in our conversation?

What are some strengths of our congregation that emerged in our conversation?

What are some challenges our congregation and pastor face that we named?

In light of all this, what goals seem most appropriate for the coming year for the pastor and congregation? Discuss those ideas and then write from one to three that emerge as most important.

Pastor

Staff-Parish Committee Chair or Representative

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Some Ideas for Pastors in Setting and Implementing Goals

Building on Strengths and Addressing Challenges

- What do I do really well?
- How can I leverage my strengths to improve effectiveness in areas of weakness?
- How can I draw on others to reinforce areas of ministry that need improvement?
- What types of continuing education or skills development might be appropriate?

Thinking through Next Steps

- What is one thing I can start doing immediately to improve effectiveness in ministry?
- What kind of support do I need?
- What kind of accountability do I need?

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